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FRAUDULENT ART

THE advent of the multi-millionaire collector, perhaps more than any other single factor, has been instrumental in sending up to a truly appalling figure the prices of those masterpieces of ancient and mediæval art which have been preserved to us. There has always, of course, been a market in such things; but in the past it has been mainly among the cognoscenti, who really understood and appreciated the articles they collected. Now the wealthy individual collector—often quite ignorant both of antiquity and of art, and inspired mainly by the sheer lust of possessing costly and envied things—has changed the situation in more than one respect. And among the more curious and less desirable of these has been the enormous impetus given to the trade in forged antiques.

Not, of course, that his trade is of recent origin. On the contrary, it probably goes back almost as far as the history of art itself. In fact, in the literature of the subject, a literature which is fast assuming huge proportions, at least one volume has been already devoted to the forgeries of classical and ancient times. The Renaissance was almost as notable for its activities in this respect as in the more legitimate fields of literature and art, and at no time since has the industry fallen altogether into abeyance. And, curiously enough, the work of forgers of past times, recognized to-day as such, has of late required a value of its own, and has even become the object of imitation by forgers of our own day. It must, in fact, be recognized

that many of these spurious objects of art possess, apart from any question of their origin, a very distinct artistic value of their own, and not the least interesting departments of some of our great museums are those devoted entirely to proved forgeries and imitations.

Among the earliest instances we possess to-day we may class the forged scarabs and ornaments found in such quantities in perfectly genuine and untouched Egyptian tombs of the later dynasties. These were imported from Greece, and as a rule are easily distinguished from the genuine article, being by no means such good imitations as those turned out in immense quantities from Birmingham to-day, and destined to be palmed off as genuine on the guileless tourist beneath the very shadow of the Pyramids. In their turn, Greek artists were imitated by the Romans, and both became the subjects of attention on a large scale in Italy when the Renaissance brought classical antiquities again into favor in Europe. Indeed, as possibly the most illustrious of all "fakers" we must mention no less a name than that of Michelangelo, a good many of whose earlier works were chipped and buried, to be later resurrected and passed off by the dealers of his time as classical antiques. One example at least is still preserved in the shape of the "Hercules" at Turin, bought by Cæsar Borgia from the sculptor for a mere trifle after it had been returned on the latter's hands by an indignant purchaser who had discovered the trick played upon him. And this is not an isolated

instance, for such artists as Fra Filippo Lippi, Andrea del Sarto, Botticelli, and others of equal fame were not above turning out the most amazingly exact reproductions of famous pictures, either to the order of a patron or occasionally as a mere exercise in technical skill. In fact, in more than one instance the question of which is original and which reproduction has been ever since hotly debated. And to come to a somewhat later period, it was by no means unusual for a son or other relative to inherit alike the family name and skill, and go on turning out paintings long after the reputed artist was laid under the sod. Such an instance was that of Jacob van Huysum, who signed most of his work with the name of the more famous Jan; while artists as skilful as Teniers the Younger would confine their talents largely to work in the style of others, notably to that of Titian. Indeed, so prevalent was this practice that it is only in the case of a very few works assigned to the Old Masters, even those in the best-known collections, whose authenticity is usually regarded as beyond question, that we can really be certain that they are the work of the artists whose names they bear. Thus, for instance, a painting so well authenticated by history and record as that known as the "Rokeby Venus," bought a few years ago for a record sum for the National Gallery, and not long since brought prominently into notice by the hatchet of a misguided Suffragette, is not by many experts believed to be the work of Velasquez at all.

In the above instances the question of authorship does not, perhaps, seriously affect even the pecuniary value of the work; but this, of course, does not apply to the more modern and properly so-called forgeries. Of these the best still

come, as is natural, from Italy, where Sienna may perhaps be regarded as the headquarters of the industry. Works sold for thousands of pounds have often been turned out by Italian workmen who received no more than a few shillings a day as the reward for their labors, of the valuable nature of which they had naturally no idea. Many of these pictures, even including the panels on which they are painted and the very worm-holes in the panels, are "fakes," but sometimes a genuine picture which has been ruined by age and neglect or by improper cleaning by ignorant owners is used as a basis for more ambitious efforts. Signatures offer no difficulty at all, for there is not the slightest difficulty in getting the signature of any artist, ancient or modern, imitated with the utmost exactitude; and one very favorite trick is to have the signature concealed by dirt or varnish, so that it shows only after the picture has been restored. In the case of a collector supremely ignorant of his subject, but possessed of the highest opinion of his own judgment, this trick is particularly successful in removing any lingering doubts.

Fly-specks, dirt, cracks, the effects of damp and neglect, all these can be, and are, perfectly imitated; while the mastery some of these obscure modern copyists have over the characteristic tricks and methods of the Old Masters is little short of miraculous. Of late, methods of chemical analysis have been called in to the aid of the art expert; but while these have revealed more than one forgery of past date, the present-day artist has, as the Americans say, "got wise" to the methods. These consist, of course, chiefly in the knowledge of the pigments used at given dates, and if analysis reveals the pres-

ence of colors unknown to the supposed artist, the inference is clear. More intricate tests may reveal the effects of age on the pigments, but it would scarcely be correct to say that the data thus given are very reliable at present. More useful in certain cases has proved the employment of X-ray photography, which reveals to some extent corrections and alterations in the work, which of course would not usually be found in a copy. Still, the need once being understood, the copyist is again perfectly willing to oblige. As a means of instituting minute comparisons as to brushwork, micro-photography in low powers has also been found useful.

Even in paintings of late date and by living artists it is quite possible to go wrong. Some artists, in fact, have of recent years turned an honest penny by giving—for a consideration—expert opinion as to whether certain pictures attributed to them are authentic or not. One very well-known man declared that some 92 per cent of those he had examined were not. And, of course, in these instances it is practically always the private purchaser who is victimized.

In plastic art quite the most notorious fabricator on record was the wonderfully gifted Bastianini. As a youth he was the assistant to a Florentine sculptor, and he developed an astonishing genius at imitating the best Italian work. About the middle of the nineteenth century his gifts were recognized by a Florentine antiquary, who gave him the means of studying the subject systematically, and of employing his talents in the work he genuinely loved. Work of his was sold as that of the best Italian sculptors, and examples found their way even to the Louvre and to South Kensington. A good deal, doubtless, passes unsuspected even to-day; but the fact

of Bastianini's existence was revealed to the world by his claiming a reward of six hundred pounds offered by the Director of the Louvre to any one who could execute a work in similar style to a bust of the Italian poet Girolamo Benivieni. This bust had been bought by the Louvre for a large sum as genuine, though actually it had been made by Bastianini for his master, who had paid him fourteen pounds for it, and the offer had been made as a challenge to some experts who expressed their doubts of its genuineness.

But this is by no means the only, or even the worst, instance where the experts of the Louvre have been imposed upon. In 1896 the Louvre purchased for eight thousand pounds a splendid example of Greek goldsmith's work said by the inscription on it to have been presented to the Scythian king Saitapharnes. It was in the shape of a magnificent crown, or, rather, tiara, and the opinion of experts was unanimous in its favor. Some years after, however, it was found that the crown had been made by a goldsmith of Odessa of the name of Rouchomouski, who was paid two hundred pounds for the work. Rouchomouski was brought to Paris, and in a room of the Louvre actually reproduced from memory a part of the crown, the ornamentation of which was most elaborate.

Odessa, it may be noted, is the home of the "fake" antique jewelry trade, at least so far as gold and silver work is concerned. Cameos, intaglios, and engraved gems of one kind and another mostly hail either from Switzerland or from Vienna, though the finest examples come as a rule from Italy. Often genuine settings, which are fairly common, the stones having been taken away and either remounted or sold at one time or

another, are used, but by no means always. The jeweller of to-day can imitate the old setting to perfection, and a few tricks of the trade will give it the finish associated with that of centuries ago.

Statuettes of all kinds in clay, marble, alabaster, wax, and so on are turned out in Paris in immense numbers. Ancient Italian bronze statuettes are imitated to perfection in Tuscany, the fine green patina which so many collectors regard as a guarantee of age being produced by chemical means. Ancient ironwork is also a specialty of Italy, especially of Florence, and wonderfully exact reproductions of ancient armor and weapons are made both in France and Italy. Italy excels more particularly in the plainer and ruder work of the earlier period, while French workmen turn out the most magnificent imitations of the highly ornamented and inlaid armor which was a feature of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and of which some splendid examples—genuine, of course—are to be seen in the Tower of London.

Coins of every date, again, constitute a veritable trap to the collector. So well and perfectly are they imitated that, except when the origin is known beyond doubt, no expert, however skilful he may be, will be prepared to vouch unquestioningly for the genuineness of any single specimen. Coins may be imitated *in toto*, or they may be touched up, restruck, or on occasion split through the middle and remade, the obverse of one being fitted to the reverse of the other. This may be done either to produce a singularly fine specimen from two imperfect examples, or, more often, to produce a coin unknown to numismatics, which some unwary collector may be induced to accept as unique. All these methods of sophistication, of course, leave traces

which can be detected by sufficiently competent and thorough examination; but they are almost always successful in imposing upon the average collector. The real expert, however, when taken in at all, is, strange to say, most likely to be deceived by the out-and-out modern forgery.

Pottery and glassware, too, as everybody knows, are regularly imitated and "improved," very few even of the best collections being altogether free from questionable work. Certain modern makers specialize, quite honestly, in reproductions of the work of the best makers of past centuries, the results being sold at moderate prices as what they really are. To this, of course, no exception can be taken; but fine specimens of such work are very often sold, after the distinguishing marks have been ingeniously altered, as genuine examples of the work of ancient potters. But a very great deal of pottery and glassware is to-day manufactured expressly to impose on the collector, and it must be admitted that in one important department, the manufacture of bogus Sèvres and Dresden ware, London may claim the dubious honor of being pre-eminent. Paris manufactures the work of French potters from Palissey downward; while Italy, which does not disdain any species of fabrication, does perhaps most in the direction of ancient Græco-Roman ware. Venice still turns out "ancient" Venetian glass, while German and Bohemian ware of the best periods is still made in Hamburg. The iridescence which is such a lovely feature of long-buried glass until lately presented a difficulty; but more than one secret process now reproduces it more or less perfectly, the most popular being the application of a chemical compound of unknown composition, followed by burial in damp earth for a year or so.

Nor are the instances quoted a tithe of those which could be given. It would, indeed, seem that the particular foibles of the collector are exploited to better purpose than any other human weakness, and certainly than any other weakness of such amiable character. Probably the fabricator of forged antiques himself regards his business as quite a legitimate sphere of activity, and there is something to be said for this view. For he does, in fact, supply a genuine demand, which

must otherwise in most cases, owing to the ravages of time and a thousand destructive agencies throughout the centuries, go unsatisfied, and to this extent it is possible that his nefarious activities do on the whole add to the sum of human happiness. And it is almost certain that many a collector, gloating over the possession of some fancied treasure, would thank little enough the expert knowledge that would reveal to him that same treasure's true value and real origin.

W. J. STEVENSON.

From Chambers's Journal, London.

I LOVED YOU ONCE

I loved you once. Perhaps not all extinguished
 Within my heart the flame that burned in vain;
 But let my love no longer yet disturb you:
 I would not wish in aught to give you pain.
 I loved you once,—now jealous and now fearful;
 My heart nor asked nor hoped for love from you.
 I loved you once,—as tenderly, as truly
 As he you'll love, God grant, shall love you too.

A. S. PUSHKIN.

From the Russian Review, London.